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ULAD OF THE DREAMS

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The first of the five parts of *Ulad of the Dreams* was originally printed in the *Re-issue of the Shorter Stories of Fiona Macleod rearranged, with additional Tales* (3 vols., 8vo, wrappers, Edinburgh, n. d. [1897]) and is there entitled *The Melancholy of Ulad*. It first appears in its complete form, as here reprinted, in *The Dominion of Dreams* (London, 1900).

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FIONA MACLEOD

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ULAD OF THE DREAMS

I

IN the sea-loch now known as that of Tarbert of Loch Fyne, but in the old far-off days named the Haven of the Foray, there was once a grianân, a sun-bower, of so great a loveliness, that throughout all the lands of the Gael the strings of the singing men's clàrsachs ceaselessly stirred to it, as at a breath of the beauty of all beauty.

This was in the days before the yellow-haired men of Lochlin came swarming in their galleys, along the lochs and fjords of the west. So long ago was it that none knows if Ulad sang his song to Fand before Diarmid the Fair was slain on the narrow place between the

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two lochs, or if it were when Colum's white robes were wont to come out of the open sea up the Loch of the Swans, that is now West Loch Tarbert, so as to reach the inlands.

But what matters the whitherset of bygone days, where the tale of the years and of the generations is as that of autumn's leaves?

Ulad was there, the poet-king; and Fand, whom he loved; and Life and Death.

None knows whence Ulad came. In the Isles of the West men said he was a prince out of the realm of the Ultonians; but there, in the north of Eiré, they said he was a king in the southlands. Art the White, the wise old Ardrigh of the peoples who dwelled among the lake-lands far south, spoke of Ulad as one born under a solitary star on the night of the Festival of Beltane, and told that he came out of an ancient land north or south of Muirnict, the sea which has the

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feet of Wales and Cornwall upon its sunrise side, and the rocks and sands of Armorica upon that where the light reddens the west. But upon Ioua, that is now Iona, there was one wiser even than Art the White — Dùach the Druid; and when questioned as to Ulad the poet-king, he said he was of the ancient people that dwelt among the inlands of Alba, the old race that had known the divine folk, the Tuatha-de-Danànn, when they were seen of men, and no mortality was upon their sweet clay. The islanders were awed by what Dùach told them; for what manner of man could this be who had seen Merlin going tranced through the woods, playing upon a reed, with wolves fawning upon him, and the noise of eagles' wings ruffling the glooms of the forest overhead?

And of Fand, has even the secret wind an echo? Bêl the Harper, whose songs and playing made women's hearts melt like wax, and in men wrought either

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intolerable longing or put sudden swift flames into the blood, sang of her. And what he sang was this: that Ulad had fared once to Hy Bràsil, and had there come upon a garth of white blooms, fragrant and wonderful, under the hither base of a rainbow. These flowers he had gathered, and warmed all night against his breast, and at the thinning of the dark breathed into them. When the sunbreak slid a rising line along the dawn he blew a frith across the palm of his left hand. What had been white blooms, made rosy with his breath and warm against his side, was a woman. It was Fand.

Who, then, can tell whether Ulad were old or young when he came to the Haven of the Foray? He had the old ancient wisdom, and mayhap knew how to wrap himself round with the green life that endures.

None knew of his being in that place, till, one set of a disastrous day, a birlinn

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drove in before the tempest sweeping from the isle of Arran up the great sea-loch of Fionn. The oarsmen drew breath when the headlands were past, and then stared with amaze. Overagainst the bay in the little rocky promontory on the north side was a house built wondrously, and that where no house had stood, and after a fashion that not one of them had seen. All marvelled with wide eyes. The sunset flamed upon it, so that its shining walls were glorious. A small round grianân it was, but built all of blocks and stones of hill-crystal, and upborne upon four great pine-boles driven deep into the tangled grass and sand, with these hung about with deerskins and fells of wolf and other savagery.

Before this grianân the men in the birlinn, upon whom silence had fallen, and whose listless oars made no lapping upon the foam-white small leaping waves of the haven, beheld a man lying face downward.

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For a time they thought the man was dead. It was one, they said, some great one, who had perished at the feet of his desire. Others thought he was a king who had come there to die alone, as Balva the Solitary had done, when he had known all that man can know. And some feared that the prone man was a demon, and the shining grianân a dreadful place of spells. The howling of a wolf, in the opposite glen that is called Strathnamara, brought sweat upon their backs; for when the half-human wish evil upon men, they hide their faces, and the howling of a she-wolf is heard.

But of a sudden the helmsman made a sign. 'It is Ulad,' he whispered hoarsely, because of the salt in his throat after that day of flight and long weariness; 'It is Ulad of the Dreams.' Then all there were glad, for each man knew that Ulad of the Dreams, that was a poet and a king, wrought no ill against any clan, and that wherever he was the swords slept.

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Nevertheless they marvelled much that he was there alone, and in that silence, with his face prone upon the wilderness, while the sunset flamed overagainst the grianân that was now like wine, or like springing blood, light and wonderful. But as tide and wind brought the birlinn close upon the shore, they heard a twofold noise, a rumour of strange sound. One looked at the other with amaze that grew into fear. For the twofold sound was wrought of the muffled sobs and prayers of the man who lay upon the grass, and of the laughter of the woman who was unseen, but who was within the grianân.

Donncha, the helmsman and leader of the seafarers, waved to his fellows to pull the birlinn close in among the weedy masses which hung from the rocks. When the galley lay there, all but hidden, and each man's head was beneath the wrack, Donncha rose. Slowly he moved to where Ulad lay, face downward, upon

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the silt of sand and broken rock that was in front of the grianân. But before he could speak, the young king rose, though not seeing the newcomer, and looking upon the sunbower, whence the laughter suddenly ceased, raised his arms.

Then, when he had raised his arms, song was upon his lips. It was a strange chant that Donncha heard, and had the sound in it of the wind far out at sea, or of a tempest moving across treeless moors, mournful, wild, filled with ancient sorrow and a crying that none might interpret. The words of it, familiar to the helmsman, and yet with a strange lip-life upon them, were as these—

'Ah, you in the grianân there, whose laughter is
on me as fire-flames,
What of the sorrow of sorrows that is mine because
of my loving—
You that came to me out of the place where the
rainbows are builded,
Is it woman you are, O Fand, who laughest up
there in thy silence?

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Sure, I have loved thee through storm and peace,
through the day and the night;
Sure, I have turned my singing of songs to a
marvellous swan-song for thee;
And death have I dared, and life have I dared, and
gloom and the grave,
And yet, O Fand, thou laughest down on my pain,
on my pain, O Fand.

All things have I thrown away gladly only to win
thee—
Kingship and lordship of men, the fame of the
sword, and all good things—
For in thee at the last, I dreamed, in thee, O Fand,
Queen of Women,
I had found all that a man may find, and was as
the gods who die not.

But what of all this to me, who am Ulad the King,
the Harper,
Ulad the Singer of Songs that are fire in the hearts
of the hearers,
Ulad the Dànann-Lord, who can bridle the winds
and the billows,
Can lay waste the greatest of dûns or build grianâns
here in the wilds—

What of all this to me, who am only a man that
seeketh,
That seeketh for ever and ever the Soul that is
fellow to his—

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The Soul that is thee, O Fand, who wert born of
flowers 'neath the rainbow,
Breathed with my breath, warmed at my breast, O
Fand, whom I love, whom I worship?

For all things are vain unto me, but one thing only,
and that not vain is—
My Dream, my Passion, my Hope, my Love, whom
I won from Hy Bràsil:
O Dream of my life, my Glory, O Rose of the
World, my Dream,
Lo, Death for Ulad the King, if thou failest, for
all that I am of the Dànann who die not.'

And when he had chanted these words, Ulad, who was young and wondrous fair to look upon, held out his arms to Fand, whom yet he did not see, for she was within the grianân.

'Then, if even not yet at the setting of the day,' the king muttered, 'patience shall be upon me till the coming of a new day, when it may be that Fand will hear my prayer.'

And so the night fell. But when the screaming of gulls came over the loch, and the plaintive crying of lapwings was

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upon the moorland, and the smell of loneroid and bracken was heavy in the wind-fallen stillness, Ulad turned, and stared with wild eyes, for he felt a touch upon his shoulder.

It was Donncha who touched him, and he knew the man. He had the old wisdom of knowing all that is in the mind by looking into the eyes, and he knew how the man had come there.

'Let the men who are your men, O Donncha, move away from here in their birlinn, and go further up into the haven.'

And because he knew mysterious things, and was wise with old wisdom, the islander did as Ulad bade, and without question. But when they were alone again, he spoke—

'Ulad, great lord, I am a man who is as idle sand beneath the feet of you who know the old wisdom, and are young with ancient youth, and are a great king in some land I know not of—so, at the least, men say. But I know one thing that you do not know.'

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'If you will tell me one thing that I do not know, O Donncha, you shall have your heart's desire.'

Donncha laughed at that.

'Not even you, O Ulad, can give me my heart's desire.'

'And what will that desire be, then, you whom the islesmen call Donncha the Wise?'

'That one might see in the dew the footsteps of old years returning.'

'That thing, Donncha, I cannot do.'

'And yet you would do what is a thing as vain as that?'

'Speak. I will listen.'

Then Donncha drew close to Ulad, and whispered in his ear. Thereafter he gave him a hollow reed with holes in it, such as the shepherding folk use on the hills. And with that he went away into the darkness.

When the moon rose, Ulad took the reed and played upon it. While he played, scales fell from his eyes, and

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dreams passed from his brain, and his heart grew light. Then he sang—

'Come forth, Fand, come forth, beautiful Fand,
my woman, my fawn,
The smell of thy falling hair is sweet as the breath
of the wild-brier—
I weary of this white moonshine who love better
the white sheen of thy breasts,
And the secret song of the gods is faint beside the
craving in my blood.

Fand, Fand, Fand, white one, who art no dream
but a woman,
Come forth from the grianân, or lo, by the word of
me, Ulad the King,
Forth shalt thou come as a she-wolf, and no more
be a woman,
Come forth to me, Fand, who am now as a flame
for thy burning!'

Thereupon a low laugh was heard, and Fand came out of the grianân. White and beautiful she was, the fairest of all women, and Ulad was glad. When near, she whispered under the shadow of his hair, and hand in hand they went back into the grianân.

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At dawn Ulad looked upon the beauty of Fand. He saw she was as a flower.

'O fair and beautiful dream,' he whispered; but of a sudden Fand laughed in her sleep, and he remembered what Donncha the Wise had told him.

'Woman,' Ulad muttered then, 'I see well that you are not my dream, but only a woman.' And with that he half rose from her.

Fand opened her eyes, and the beauty of them was greater for the light that was there.

'Then you are only Ulad, a man?' she cried, and she put her arms about him, and kissed him on the lips and on the breast, sobbing low as with a strange gladness. 'I will follow you, Ulad, to death, for I am the woman of your love.'

'Ay,' he said, looking beyond her, 'if I feed you, and call you my woman, and find pleasure in you, and give you my manhood.'

'And what else would you, O Ulad?' Fand asked, wondering.

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'I am Ulad the Lonely,' he answered; this, and no more.

Then, later, he took the hollow reed again, and again played. And when he had played he looked at Fand. He saw into her heart and into her mind.

'I have dreamed my dream,' he said; 'but I am still Ulad the Seer.'

With that he blew a frith across the palm of his left hand, and said this thing:—

'O woman that would not come to me, when I called out of that within me which is I myself, farewell!'

And with that Fand was a drift of white flowers there upon the deerskins.

Then once more Ulad spoke—

'O woman, that heeded no bitter prayer which I made, but at the last came only as a she-wolf to the wolf, farewell!'

And with that a wind-eddy scattered the white flowers upon the deerskins, and they wavered hither and thither, and some were stained by the pale wandering fires of a drifting rainbow.

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At noon, the seafarers came towards the grianân with songs and offerings.

But Ulad was not there.

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II

For three years after Ulad wooed Fand in the grianân in the Haven of the Foray, none who knew him of old beheld his shining eyes.

Some said he had gone to Tir-na'n-Og; some that he had sailed for the Islands of Desire. His galley had been seen in the north, so rumour ran; its prow set for those isles where the fabled Fomorians lived, those Hebrid isles given over to wild seas, wild winds, and wild men. Others had recognised the white sail with the yellow star off the coast of Eri, in the sun-track that lies under the rainbow in the west over Hy Bràsil. Meanwhile the poets sang of the Lonely King, of Fand whom he had won and lost, and of the Melancholy of Ulad. Of these songs, the sweetest and most marvellous were those of Bêl the Harper —he whose songs and playing made

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women's hearts melt like wax, and in men wrought either intolerable longing or put sudden swift flames into the blood.

Bêl the Harper sang of Fand. Fair she was and wonderful; but when Ulad had looked into her mind, he had seen there only the shadow of his own passion, and the phantom of his own love, and the image of his loneliness.

All men knew the tale, for Bêl sang it by forest-fires and in the raths where the women, too, listened with shining eyes.

Was she a woman as other women are? they wondered; she whom Ulad had wrought in Hy Bràsil out of a garth of white blooms gathered under the hither base of a rainbow — gathered, and warmed all night against his breast, and at dawn become a woman there by his side.

Meanwhile dark days were upon all the regions of the Gael, in Eri, and in Alba. Wars went to and fro. The sword was like a travelling bird. The forests

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and valleys had a harvest of the red flowers of flame.

Great kings perished: some in battle, some taken unawares, some ignobly. The ollavs and the bards were awestricken. A sound of lamentation prevailed throughout distracted lands. In the dim recesses of the ancient woods the deathless alien folk congregated in the obscurities of twilight, in the blackness of night. Old forgotten gods came and sat by desolate pools, staring into prophetic waters. The tall deathly women who take their hearts in their hands and play the fatal music of impossible desires, these flame-eyed demons haunted the black pine-forests. Among the oaks, inhuman shapes sat and brooded. Strange portents were upon the mountains in the west, in the north, and in the east: out of the south came wild rains, thunders, shakings, and tremblings of the earth.

At the end of the third year there was no great king left.

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Brooding chieftains eyed each other jealously, but there was no commune of swords.

The rich and the poor, the lordly and the ignoble, dwelled in fear of their fellow-men, and in worse fear of the demons, the congregrating gods out of forgotten places, the laughter of a dreadful folk, winged and crested, heard often in the moonshine, and followed always by a sound as of stabbings and a wild forlorn screaming. Who were they who laughed in the moonshine, and stabbed for joy, and fed upon the screaming terror of strayed men? None knew; no more than any knew who lit the sudden blazing fires upon treeless hills, or of what the echoes were that made a dreadful mocking among the hollows in the mountains. One king only survived; but he did not reign. Colla was old and weary. He lived alone, in a raised house of wicker-boughs, at the forest-end of the great lake of Bandore, at whose head was

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the rath of the King of the North — a rath dishevelled and unfrequented now, save by a feeble, eager folk, for there was no King of the North, nor any feudal kings, save only Colla that was too weary with age and sorrow.

One night Colla sat by the pine-logs, staring through the flame into the past. He heard no sound, but suddenly knew that some one stood by him.

When he looked, startled, he saw a tall woman, taller than any woman he had ever seen, and of a beauty dreadful and wonderful. She was clad in a green robe that hung about her like innumerous little leaves; her eyes were dark and shadowy as forest-pools; but whenever they moved, they had a flame in them as of a windblown torch.

'Peace be with you,' said Colla.

The demon laughed.

'It is not for peace I come, O Colla,' said the woman; 'but to play to you upon my heart that you may have wisdom.'

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With that she took her heart out of her breast, and blew the red out of it into a bloody foam, and then played upon the seven strings that were laid bare.

When she had played a brief while she stopped. Her eyes were upon Colla as two wind-spent fires. He rose.

'I know now what to do, O Woman out of the Woods,' he said. 'But where shall I find Bêl the Harper, and where shall I find Ulad the Dreamer, and where shall I find Aithnê his Dream?'

'You shall hear the harping of Bêl when you speak to the people three days hence at the Rath of Bandore. And there shall be an echo, after Bêl's playing, which shall tell him where he may find Ulad. But of Aithnê I can tell you nothing, save that she dwells under the rainbow in the west.'

With that the woman turned and went back into the night.

Till dawn Colla sat and dreamed of life and death. He passed into that

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shadowy realm where memories move with august and mournful eyes. Lordship of men and women, forlorn vicissitudes, dropping decays: thus moved the circuit of his thoughts. He had seen the wheels of fortune—chariot-wheels of a dreadful and unseeing God.

When the morrow came he left his retreat among the reeds of Bandore and went to the rath. There he bade the war-horns be blown, and all the people summoned from far and near: every prince and every warrior and every man who bore a sword or carried spear and bow. All were to assemble there to hear what he had to say, to hear the last words of the last of the kings.

It was a mighty concourse that assembled at noon on that third day. Many sons of kings were there, and great lords. All were weary of an unruled realm; the hearts of all were heavy because of the portents, and of the return of the old banished gods, and of the lighting of mysterious

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fires, and of the obscure congregation of demons, and nocturnal laughter, cries, and prophesyings. So that when Colla said what he had to say, all listened with eagerness. At the close a great shout went up. Even those who held aloof from the revelation of a demon were glad that a great king should be found to rule over all the northlands of the Gael; and if Ulad lived, there was none better than he, for all that no man there knew more of him than that he bore a great name, and was accounted one of the lords of the world, though where his own kingdom was, and what his people, none knew.

'But where is he? Where is Ulad the Lonely? Where is Ulad our King?' the whole assemblage cried as with one voice, when Colla sat back on the golden chair of Bandore.

It was then that a wild, sweet harping was heard.

All turned and looked towards the reedy end of the Lake of Bandore,

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whence the rumour of the music. Along the path from the west a man walked, harping as he came.

It was Bêl the Harper.

He stopped when he came to the white cliff to the west side of the rath. He stared a long while, for he had seen no such concourse of the people, nor any such assemblage of the mighty ones, since the day when the Seven Kings of the North lost all, in the great battle beyond the mountains of Doon.

Colla rose, and called to Bêl.

'Hail, O King. I hear. Glory to our lost land!'

'Play to us, O Bêl.'

Then Bêl played upon his harp, and he sang. The hearts of all were like running water when he played, and like melted wax before his singing was done.

In the silence that followed his singing, and the marvellous sweet harping whereof the secret was his own, there was heard a strange thing. The music of the stricken

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strings moved upward like a homing dove seeking her way; or like blue wood-smoke when there is no wind. It moved against the face of the white cliff, clinging wanderingly there with pale, aërial wings of sound, or breaths of invisible song.

A sweet, wild air, incommunicable, delicate as falling dew, stole from the cliff, the fragrance of the spiral music netted among the unseen facets wrought of wind and sun. None knew what it forebode, nor could any there liken the sweet, fantastic rhythm to any rare sounds made by mortal man.

All saw that Bêl the Harper stood as though entranced: for his own harping was the most wonderful since Cravetheen played death into the love of Cormac Conlingas, and the beautiful Eilidh whom he loved so passing well.

'Speak, Bêl!' cried Colla: 'speak! For all may see that you hear what we cannot hear, in that echo upon the cliff of Bandore.'

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Slowly the Harper looked round: slowly he advanced. He spoke no word till he was near the golden chair of the king. 'O king . . . and it is you, Colla of the house of Amergin the Great King, whom I thought dead, as are all other kings in this weary land now, save one. . . . O king, that is no echo that seems an echo up there on the cliff. I know that strange, sweet singing.'

'If it be not an echo, what then is that singing and confused murmur as of reeds in the wind? And where, O Bêl, have you heard that strange, sweet singing?'

'I have heard that singing, ay, and that confused murmur as of reeds in the wind, long, long ago, when I was a boy. It was when I had sailed three days and three nights, without food or water, driven seaward on the crest of an endless, wind-harried wave. I did not know then that the land I came to, and lingered in for what may have been a day or a year, or a day of many years, was Hy Bràsil.'

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At this a low whisper went from mouth to mouth among all who listened. At last Colla spoke —

'Then, Bêl, that sweet music that has now ceased is like unto that which long years ago was sweet against your ears, in the Land of Youth, over-sea?'

'Even so, O king. There is none like it. No man playeth it, no man knoweth it. Only the heroes in Flatheanas hear it: it is like dew upon the grass in Tir-na'n-Og, if that indeed be other than Hy Bràsil itself. Only those may hear it who put their left ear against the wind at the rising of the moon. The green people know it, and the silent ones whom we see no more, and those who dwell in shadow, and the unremembered gods, and the demons.'

'And there is none that plays it, none that knows it?'

'I have known none save two others than myself. As for me, I play but an echo of it. But I know it.'

'And the two others?'

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'One was Cravetheen the Harper, whose soul is with the demons because of the fiery death he wrought upon Cormac Conlingas, and upon the beauty of Eilidh. His soul now is a torn harp whereon demons play when they see beauty debased or destroyed. That is the sin of sins, O king: to destroy beauty.'

'And the other?'

'The other is Ulad the Dreamer, him whom I have sung of so often, Ulad the Lonely. And by the same token, it is of Ulad and no other that the swarm of music on the cliff was.'

'Tell us the hidden word. Speak without fear. As for me, I reign here only until the Ardree, the High King, shall come.'

'The singing was like this: though my words, O Colla, are as bats after the brown birds that sing in the night. . . .

'" In the wild westlands
Of Alba the foam-swept,
Awaiteth your High King,
Predestined and worthy.

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Ulad his name is,
Ulad the Lonely:
And great is the fame of him,
A King from his birthtide,
A King among warriors.
Call him to rule ye,
O people of Eri,
Lest evils unnumbered
Pursue ye still further,
Till camp-fires and dûns
And green raths in green places
Are few in all Eri
As heroes and kings are!"'

When Bêl the Harper ceased, all there gave a great shout.

Swords leapt into the air.

'Ulad! Ulad!' all cried. 'Go hence, O Bêl, and bring back Ulad the King to reign over us.'

Thereupon Colla stepped forward.

'Hearken, O Bêl, and all ye warriors and folk. I, Colla the King, hold peace here until that day when Ulad the King shall return with Bêl the Harper to be Ardree of all the northlands of the Gael,

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from the two seas and the waist of Eri, to the coasts of Alba and the Isles of the North.'

And so it was.

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III

For the three years which followed the coming of Ulad to Bandore, there was peace in all the lands of the north.

The tributary kings laid aside their swords: the spear and the arrow, save in the fray of the hunt, quenched no longer their red thirst. Everywhere blue smoke ascended, from the great straths, from the shore-combes, from inland valleys, from the woodlands. The green corn grew to a yellow harvest: the aftermath was filled with peace, and without rumour of battles and dissensions. Winter, spring, summer; the white to the brown, the brown to the yellow, the yellow to the green, the green to the russet: each season came and went, orderly, glad, welcome.

In the forest townships and the great raths on the plain the people grew slowly to the likeness of Ulad. The ollavs

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preached a life of peace and fair deeds; the poets sang of the great past, and of heroes, and of beautiful women, and of the passion of life, and in the songs of one and all was the beauty of dream.

Long, long afterward, this time was sung of as the golden age.

With longing eyes many a dreamer has turned upon it his backward gaze, fain of a day when men and women loved and had joy, in great peace, and to the charmed music of dream.

Yet even in that day the loneliness of Ulad became a proverb.

All men rejoiced save Ulad the King.

He dwelt solitary, the strange poet. In vain men praised him for great deeds: in vain the bards sang of his own sweet harping, exceeding that of Bêl himself; in vain women offered him white arms, the beating heart, soft eyes of flame.

Of his great deeds he held small account, and was weary of the idle rumour of such things; because all his

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heart yearned for the one great love he dreamed of. And little solace for him was any singing of bards or soft playing of harps and reed flutes, who had by day and by night a lovelier, a more wild, a more haunting music in the lonely glens and wide, desolate, shadowy straths of his mind. Tall women, gracious, sweet, beautiful, with these he might have had joy; but ever since he had slain Fand with his will, he could seek no love of any woman. There was but one woman in the world for him; and of her he knew only silence and memory.

Bêl the Harper alone knew the story of the love of Ulad.

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IV

And this is that tale.

In the spring of the year that followed the passing of Fand, Ulad the Lonely reached a great fjord in the remote north of Alba. There he met Aithnê, the woman of whom he had dreamed. She was the daughter of a lord of the north isles, Cormac of the Rocks, so-called because he had his dûn on the summit of the midmost of three great heights at the south end of a green and lovely island.

Aithnê Ulad loved from the hour when he first saw her. She was tall, and fleet as a roe, and lovely as the sun-dazzle on the sea. Her dusky hair waved over a face of so great a beauty that Ulad's heart ached because of it. Dark, curving eyebrows made a lovely twilight above her eyes, which were of a lustrous grey-green hazel, like the sunlit green hollow

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of a wave over sand, though often they darkened with a soft, dewy dusk, wonderful to see. Her flower-like face was as that of Deirdrê or Grainne or Blanid, only more full of dream and ecstasy even than hers whose eyes lit the death of Naois, more fair and exceeding sweet than that of her for whom Diarmid gave up all, more sad with extreme of joy than that of her before whom a man's life passed in flame. Yes, Ulad thought, she had the surpassing beauty of that Eilidh, queen of women, with whom Isla the Singer swam forth, at the dawn following a disastrous day, swam forth, seaward, against the sunrise. And she was fair and wild and dreamlike, as was Fand, whom he had wrought out of white and red flowers gathered at the base of a rainbow in Hy Bràsil.

And Aithnê? She loved Ulad. All of her life went out to him. He was her lord, her prince, her singer of songs, her dreamer of dreams, her hero, her king.

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The hour came when at last he spoke. It was at dusk, by a glade, overagainst the running wave. Words swam into hearing, and drowned in passionate silence. Each came to each as two flames that become one.

Later he told her of Fand. Then he spoke of Eilidh, whom his kinsman Isla the Singer had loved and won, and made a deathless memory among men because of her queenlihood of beauty and the extreme mighty reach and wonder of their love.

'And lo,' he whispered at the last, 'Fand was indeed but a dream—the idle foam on the running wave of my dream. But thou—thou, Aithnê, art my dream itself.'

She sighed and pressed her heart against his. He heard her voice as one may hear drops trickling through the moss beside the surge and roar of a mountain-torrent.

'And thou, Ulad . . . thou art Ulad!'

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In the beating heart of silence that followed they lived, in a shadow-fleeting moment, all life. Then, abruptly, the boughs of a low, spreading oak disparted. A man stepped forth. It was Olg, son of the brother of Cormac of the Rocks.

He cast his dark, frowning eyes upon Aithnê, but did not look at Ulad, though the words he spoke were for him.

'The yellow-haired men are upon us,' he said simply.

Ulad withdrew his claspt hand from that of Aithnê. Then, suddenly, he stooped his head, and put his lips upon the white flower he had held. Olg moved forward soundlessly.

With the point of his spear he drew blood from his arm and let it drop into the hollow of his right hand. This, still speaking no word, he spilled between Aithnê and Ulad. With a bloody finger he touched the breast of Ulad.

Aithnê drew back, pale. But her eyes flamed.

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Ulad stood for a moment, pondering. Then he stooped and took Aithnê's hands in his, and kissed her on the lips.

'So be it, Olg, son of Olg,' he said.

Thuswise Ulad and Aithnê parted, knowing that Olg had put a feud to the death between himself and Ulad, and had spilled blood to be a widening gulf for ever betwixt him and Aithnê. On the morrow the men would meet. Now it was night, and the yellow-haired men were come.

At the rising of the moon, swords and spears sang their wild song. Deep thirst was theirs, and none went forth of that dreadful Battle of the Rising Moon unquenched.

A grey dawn, streaked with red, as though tattered banners flaunted above invisible skyey armies met in war, brought an end to a strife which by moor and hillside and shore had endured till the stars swam pale and sank drowned in light.

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The yellow-haired northmen were everywhere: but they were still now. On the heather, beside granite boulders, on the wave-splashed white rocks, their motionless bodies lay, no battle-song upon their lips, no fire in their blue eyes. The sunrise turned their locks into pale gold, and put a faint bloom against the whiteness of their faces. Neither thoughts nor desires were behind these silent brows, but only the iron of the spear-head or the adder tongue of the feathered arrow. They slept well, these warriors.

The tide of battle had already ebbed for Lochlin when, at the first greying of the dark, a fleet of thirty galleys had come from the north of the island and taken the Vikings by surprise. Their wave riders were driven ashore, and only two escaped, and these only because of a slight mist that drifted here and there upon the sea.

An ebbing tide, for sure; but a tide that bore with it a mighty tribute to the

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valour of the men of Lochlin. Cormac of the Rocks, and his five sons, and most of his blood-kin with more than ten score of his clansmen, fell in that Battle of the Rising Moon. There was thrice a time when all would have been lost but for the might and voice of Ulad. It was on that field he won his name, the Brother of Death.

When all was over, Ulad sought Aithnê. Nowhere in or near the great dûn of Cormac, nor in the rath by the inland loch, was there any trace of the daughter of the king. For three days and three nights men searched like hounds every cave, every glen, every corrie, passing from tree to tree in the woods, from boulder to boulder upon the hills: but vainly.

There were many island galleys lying deep in the green water besides those of the Vikings, but in none of these was the body of Olg found, nor was it traced elsewhere. For he, too, had disappeared.

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In all, among the slain and wounded and whole, among all who dwelt upon the island, there were nine missing—Aithnê and Olg and seven men of his own following.

It was feared that, caught in a disastrous ebb of battle, Olg had tried to escape, and sought to save Aithnê, but that one of the Viking galleys had run them down. The prowling things of the sea would have them now.

Only Ulad knew in his heart that Aithnê was alive. Could death come to her, and he not know it? Would not every leaping nerve cry out with the knowledge?

That Olg had fled with her he felt sure: but whither? What way do the wild swans fly when they have left behind them the green seas of the Pole?

Week after week passed. Not a trace of the missing ones was found, not the faintest rumour came from any of the isles or the mainland.

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For six months, and till the very heart of winter, Ulad spared not one single day to rest. To each and every of the isles he sailed, and along the wild coasts of Alba, from the Cape of Storms to where the foam whitens along the Moyle. Then when the first breath of spring blew soft across the snow on the hills and the drifting ice on the lochs, he set sail by the unknown sea-ways to the north isles of the Normen, and afterwards to Lochlin itself.

At the end of a year from the Battle the Rising Moon he knew nothing further of Aithnê. Nowhere had he found a trace of the fugitives: from no man in any land, neither from Gael nor Pict nor Northman, had he heard one word of the beautiful daughter of Cormac of the Rocks, nor yet of Olg the Swarthy. Nevertheless he knew that Aithnê lived.

That summer no one of his people or following saw Ulad, no nor for two years thereafter. But in all lands he journeyed,

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harping and singing, though there was only one song on his lips, that which lay below all songs he sang, the song of his desire: and only one music in his heart, that of the beauty of Aithnê, of his deathless dream.

When the third spring came shining out of cloud-woven blue and along the wet green sprays of the larches, Ulad returned to Alba. His heart was weary but still he failed not in his quest.

With the first heats of summer he grew faint and despairing. The beauty of the world whispered night and day of her whose beauty was to him his star, his joy, his strength, his dream, his life.

One gloaming, as he moved through the woods at the end of the great Loch of Fionn, abruptly he stood still, the blood leaping from his heart and striking swift, heavy blows against his brain. Before him on the shore was a man, crouching beside a fire, and singing to himself as he watched the deer-meat

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catch the flame. And the song that he sang was one Ulad himself had wrought, and sang to Aithnê, and made it hers because she and no other was worthy of the name Heart o' Beauty.

'O where are thy white hands, Heart o' Beauty?
Heart o' Beauty!
They are as white foam on the swept sands,
Heart o' Beauty!
They are as white swans over dusky lands,
They are wands, magic wands, thy white hands,
Heart o' Beauty!

From the white dawn till the grey dusk,
Heart o' Beauty!
I hear the unseen waves of unseen strands,
Heart o' Beauty!
I see the sun rise and set over shadowy lands,
But never, never, never thy white hands, thy white hands,
Heart o' Beauty!'

Trembling, wrought with a great fear, a greater hope, Ulad soundlessly drew near.

The man sprang to his feet, startled. He had heard a dry twig crackle. When

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he saw Ulad he let his spear droop to his side.

'I will do you no harm,' said Ulad slowly, 'but I will know one thing of you.'

'That I see well,' the man answered; 'and as for the thing you desire to know, speak.'

'It is this. When and where and from whom heard you that song?'

'I heard it from the lips of Derg son of Teig son of Derg of the Three Fords. It was at a place not far from here, near the grianân on the west shore of the sea-loch known as the Haven of the Foray. It is where, as Bêl the Harper sings, Ulad the Poet-King wooed the woman Fand that he wrought out of red and white flowers, and where she died as a pluckt flower dies.'

'And what of Ulad?'

'He loved overmuch. And so he too died.'

'Is he dead, in truth?'

'So men say. Nevertheless he died not by the grianân where Fand laughed

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at his pain, as some of the singers have it. For I have heard from Derg son of Teig, who gave me that song, that Ulad the Lonely came to his death among the far isles of the north after the Battle of the Rising Moon, wherein Cormac of the Rocks and most of his kinship were slain.'

'And when was it that that Derg son of Teig gave this song to you?'

'On the night of the new moon: and the moon is now sickle-shaped again.'

Ulad's heart beat, and he stared at the man strangely.

'Your name?' he said at last.

'Coran, who also am called Coran-Cù because of my fleetness.'

At that Ulad drew from his belt a blade, hilted with amber.

'Take this, Coran the Hound, and keep it in memory of me, who am Ulad the Lonely, for it is great news you have given me this day.'

Coran made an obeisance, and looked with wondering eyes at the face of him

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whose name was in so many songs of love and battle.

'Tell me, Coran, of this Derg son of Teig.'

'He was one of those who escaped after the Battle of the Rising Moon. Some say every islander died in that great fight, save only the few who fled with Olg son of Olg the Blind, brother of Cormac of the Rocks. All were drowned off an unknown shore, save only Derg and Olg and Aithnê, daughter of Cormac of the Rocks.'

Ulad leaned forward as a sleuth-hound leans when the smell on the track grows keen. His eyes were on fire with blue flame of hope.

'And—and—Aithnê—Olg and Aithnê —are they—were they also at the Haven of the Foray?'

'No. Derg lay there, because of his wound. Aithnê came with him and seven other men from where she lived with Olg the Swarthy, a king of some

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land now, I know not where. She came there to die, because from the songs of the poets she knew that was where Ulad, whom she loved, blew into dead blossoms the flower that was Fand. Of a truth, she may have hoped to meet you again, O Ulad, for it is said you are not of those whose dust is in the earth.'

'And then?'

'Then Olg pursued her, and came to the Haven of the Foray, and called upon her to come back to him, being his wife. But she answered that though her body had been made bondager to him, she was free, and loved Ulad only, and that, too, whether he was in life or in death. Moreover, she swore by the sun and by the wind that if Olg sought her further, she would slay herself.

'"Mayst thou not love two men, Aithnê?" Olg cried, for he was fain of her whom he had made his wife.

'"Rather should I know death," she answered. "There is but one love, that

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which passeth all else, and that is as life itself. It is Ulad I love, and I am no man's henceforth, nay, though Ulad my king were now but as wind-harried dust."

'"Ulad is dead, O Aithnê," Olg cried again, taking the death-oath by the moon.

'But Aithnê would not hearken to his plea. She said these words: "If he be living still, I shall find my King. If he be dead, my King awaiteth me. There is but one love."

'It was then that Olg strove to land and take back Aithnê, whom he had made his wife. But Derg and those with him fought for the fair daughter of Cormac — Heart o' Beauty, as you yourself have called her, O Ulad. And in that strife Olg was driven back, weak with open wounds, and stricken unto death. Aithnê, with the three men who had not been slain, save Derg, who was left as one dead, sailed westward.'

Here Coran stopped, as though he had no more to say. But Ulad bore hardly

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upon him, and he told all. He had come upon Derg, and had comforted his wound. And Derg had told him how on the morrow he had seen a galley drifting by, bottom upward, and thus knew that Aithnê and her company had seen death in the hollow of a wave. Thereafter he had waited with Derg a while, and it was from him he learned that song. Then a shadow had grown through Derg, and he died.

Ulad bowed his head. His hope was as a wounded bird that flutters on the ground.

Nevertheless he remembered what Aithnê had said, and was glad. But all he said was this: 'Truly, O Coran, there is but one love. All else is but a shadow.' Only to himself he whispered —

'If she be living still, I shall find my Queen. If she be dead, my Queen awaiteth me. There is but one love.'

From that day, dreaming his dream, Ulad the Lonely forgot war and the seat

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of wisdom and the commune of the homestead and rath and dûn, and dwelled only with his thoughts and dreams by the grianân on the Haven of the Foray. And so until the day when Bêl the Harper came and led him forth to be High King of all the northlands of the Gael.

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V

It was, indeed, a great and wonderful peace that was upon all northern Gaeldom during the three years when Ulad was High King. All things moved orderly, and to fair and noble issues. But the King knew sorrow: deep sorrow brooded in his heart throughout every hour of every day, whether he hunted in the woods or on the hills, or trained the young men in the noble and chivalrous life of the sword and of peace, or sat in council, or listened to the bards or to the mysteries of those who were the servants of the gods, or moved or ate or rested, or himself played upon the harp, or wandered alone, or dwelled solitary in memories: and in sorrow each night he closed his eyes.

For there is but one love.

Of what avail the glory of the king unto the King himself? Had he not but one glory: Aithnê? Had he not but one

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desire: Aithnê? Had he not but one joy, one hope, one peace?

There came a day when a rumour reached him that far in the southland of Eri a most fair and wonderful queen lived with a great prince, Artân, and that she was a daughter of a dead king of the isles. The man who brought the rumour said that she was called Aithnê.

Ulad pondered a while. Then he knew that Aithnê could not be that queen, for she would have come to him. There is but one love.

Nevertheless, he sent Bêl the Harper into the southlands, and bade him bring word of this queen.

At the third rising of the moon after he left, Bêl's harp once more made music in Bandore. It was true that the wife of Artân was called Aithnê, and that she was fair and comely and gracious. But her beauty beside that of Aithnê whom Ulad loved was as the wan face of February beside the glory of June.

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And so it went till the third year of Ulad's over-lordship was gone. On the morrow of the fourth year, the elders among the men of rank, and the priests, and the bards, came to him with a prayer. And that prayer was that he would take unto himself a queen. Every fair woman that was unwed would gladly be wife to Ulad; and there were in that day seven women so beautiful beyond all others that they were sung of by the bards as the seven roses of Gaeldom.

Ulad listened to what they had to say. When they ceased, he spoke—

'There is no woman in all the lands of the Gael whose eyes can dim for me the beauty of the eyes of Aithnê, daughter of Cormac of the Rocks, and for whom year after year I have waited, famished. My dream stayeth me.'

'Nevertheless, O Ulad,' they urged, 'the Aithnê of your love is surely dead long since. Out of a thousand beautiful women, surely there is one you would have

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to wife. Pluck whomso you will of the Seven Roses of the Gael. Nay, if your heart is set upon it, lead us to war against this Artân, King in the Southland, and take unto yourself his queen Aithnê, who may yet prove to be her whom you have lost.'

'There is but one love,' answered Ulad, and turned wearily from those who spoke. Straightway thereafter he went into the forest behind the great dûn of Bandore, and dwelled there with his ancient sorrow and bitter unquenched thirst of desire till the dews lay cool upon his brows, and the stars filled the night with solemn signals of wild, impossible, unrelinquished dreams. At the last, the dawn came, rose-red and grey. Then he returned to his own place, and to the weary glory of the king, and to his ancient sorrow and the bitter unquenched thirst of his inappeasable desire.

One eve the aged Colla came to him.

'Ulad,' he said after a long silence, 'I too have known the dark crown of sor-

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row. I too have been a king. And I am old now with the exceeding heavy burden of the years. It is thus, mayhap, that I can see into your heart. I see dark lonely sorrow there. But this I see also, that you are a king, and will do wearily, but yet will do, what you have to do.'

'Listen, Colla of the White Hair. When I was young I sojourned a while with the greatest prince among the princes of men. It was over-sea, in the land of the Kymry. And when I bade him farewell, I asked him to put his hands upon me and wish me the one thing I should need. He wished me neither happiness, nor great fortune, nor fame, nor victory in war, nor love of women, nor great wisdom, nor song, nor the dream of the dreamer; but what he said unto me was this—"O Dreamer of dreams, this wish shall I wish thee: Strength to endure until the end." And so, Colla of the White Hair, I bethink

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me often of the saying of that prince among men.'

At that, Colla went away comforted somewhat. Yet in his heart he knew that Ulad's hour was moving swift across some far-off hill or through deep forests.

He turned to speak to the king once more. But Ulad was staring against the west, his eyes filled with the glory of his dream.

From that day, nevertheless, a growing weakness came upon the High King. Yet was it no weakness of the body; for when Balba, the lord of Tyr-Connla, the tallest and strongest of all the princes in Gaeldom, openly in anger struck his wife Malv, Ulad seized him by the waist and whirled him above his head and dashed him upon the ground. 'Eat dust, thou dog who strikest a woman,' he cried; but to deaf ears, for Balba had already fared to a dim shadowy land whence none could hear the thin falling echo of his perishing cry of wrath.

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The Festival of Peace was nigh, and all men made ready to rejoice. On the lips of every bard throughout the realms of the north was the glory of the King. All dreamed of a mighty kingdom yet to be. But Ulad dreamed only of a kingdom beyond the Rainbow.

One yellow wane of day, in the fall of the leaf, Ulad sat in a great carved chair outside the dûn. Not one of those who were about him spoke. All saw that the King dreamed his dream. Bêl the Harper had been playing upon the harp. In the dim land of sound all there had followed lovely desires. Ulad longed with ancient sorrow, with bitter unquenched thirst of the aching heart.

Bêl slowly struck the strings once more. Abruptly he ceased. All looked at him. The eyes of the bard were fixed upon one, clad in green, who came slowly out of the wood.

When he drew near, he played low upon the small harp that he carried.

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None stirred, because of the sweetness of what he played. Only Bêl sighed, and Ulad's eyes darkened.

It was but the song of a bird in the moonshine: sweet as that, brief as that. But when the green harper had ceased playing, Bêl rose, and threw his own harp from him, and bowed his head. Then, raising it, he looked at Ulad.

'The Hour awaits, O King,' he said.

But Ulad made no answer. His shadow-haunted eyes wavered not in their intent gaze upon him who had come out of the forest, and was known of no man, and had a strange light upon his face that came from within, and whose faint smile brought to him dim memories of splashing waves and the salt weedy smell of island shores.

'The Hour is come, O King,' said Bêl the Harper once more. But even while he spoke, the green Harper played.

At that playing, all who heard passed into the shadowy land of dreams. Some

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beheld joy, and dallied with it; some peace, and wooed it; some love, some honour, some fortune. Strong men sat brooding, heedless of the sword, idle to the hunter's horn, recking only to the song of deep delight, of deeper peace, of a dream within a dream. In the heart of women tears and longings subsided in a spray of mist, and out of that mist came white doves and lovely rainbow-hued phantoms of desire. There was silence upon every bush, upon every tree. Not a bird moved. Each little brown breast quivered. The wild deer in the forest stood, with one hoof lifted; the fawns trembled like aspens, for all their life had ebbed into their liquid wondering eyes. The fox blinked drowsily among the oak-roots. There was dream upon every living thing.

Bêl the Harper died in that hour. He beheld again his youth, and he died. He only of all men save Ulad might know, might understand, the secret song

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that the green harper played. And in sooth he knew. The smile was on his lips still, when, unseen of all there, who saw but his body prone on the grass, he was moving swift through a flowery glade in Tir-na'n-Og, radiant again in the exceeding sweet beauty of youth, and calling, calling, calling a woman's name with a sobbing joy.

And Ulad . . . he, too, heard, understood. In that playing he saw the sweet phantom of the face of Aithnê, heard the far echo of her calling voice.

None saw him go. That which was in the golden chair did not stir; nevertheless, Ulad rose and passed before all there. The green harper smiled, and moved before him into the forest. They fared onward, and left the forest glooms and went over the shoulder of the smooth green hill facing the west.

Beyond, the whole land and distant sea lay in a haze of golden vapour. Gloriously aflame, a rainbow builded

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itself superbly against the vast precipitous cloud-cliffs behind.

Under the rainbow Ulad walked, with glad eager eyes.

'Behold thy kingdom, Ulad,' said a voice beside him, a voice so passing sweet that his spirit moved unto the depth of life. He looked, thinking to behold the shining eyes of the harper. It was the face of Aithnê, the voice of Aithnê, the hand of Aithnê.

'Aithnê!' he cried.

She put her arms about him, and kissed him on the lips.

'If he be living still, I shall find my King,' she whispered. 'There is but one love.'

It was then that Colla the White, leaning above the cold face of Ulad where he sat white and still in the great chair of the Ardree, and looking into the deep quiet of the now untroubled eyes, raised

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his withered shaking hands, and in a great voice called through the death-foam on his lips, 'Behold! the Glory of the King!'

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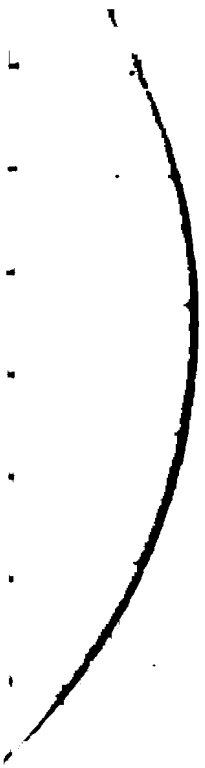

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